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“HUNTED FOR FINS”

OCEANA PUBLISHES A REPORT DOCUMENTING THE LITTLE-KNOWN EUROPEAN SHARK FISHERIES

**Threatened sharks species are caught by European fleets around the world,
largely without any management at all**

Oceana, the international organization dedicated to conserving and protecting the oceans, has carried out a year-long investigation into European shark fisheries and trade around the world. The results will be published throughout the summer and fall in a series of scientific reports aimed at shedding light on this unmanaged fishery. The first of these reports, published today, reveals that sharks are targeted species hunted by European pelagic longline vessels for their valuable fins. The report concludes that these vulnerable species, targeted in directed fisheries, must be managed under a European fisheries management plan that would allow for their sustainable exploitation and stop the current depletion of pelagic sharks in the world's oceans.

The European Union includes some of the most important shark fishing nations in the world. In 2005, European Union countries together reported the second largest elasmobranch (sharks, rays and skates) catch in the world, with nearly 100,000 metric tons. Spain took the largest share at around 39% of the EU total, followed by France (22%), Portugal (16%) and the UK (11%).

Traditionally, sharks were considered as “bycatch” (incidental catches) in fisheries for highly migratory species like tuna and swordfish. Today, sharks are the main targeted species of these fisheries comprised of more than 200 efficient European surface longliners (mostly Spanish and Portuguese) operating all over the world. Spain possesses, by far, the biggest European longline fleet. The Spanish longliners catch in the Atlantic Ocean is comprised of more than 67% sharks, with swordfish and tuna representing only a small portion of the catch. Spain is also one of the most important players in the world market for shark fins.

The revised European Union “Common Fisheries Policy,” agreed in 2002, states that catch and/or effort limits should be established for commercial fish stocks. However, this has not yet been done for these commercialized species.

“Despite the fact that sharks have been commercialized for decades, it is incomprehensible that this policy has not been applied to shark fisheries”, said Ricardo Aguilar, Director of Research for Oceana in Europe. “Sharks fins are nowadays among the most valuable products taken from the sea, and sharks are targeted in directed fisheries. They must be recognized as commercially exploited species and their exploitation must be controlled and regulated under a fisheries management plan”, adds Aguilar.

The reason for the directed hunt, and for increasing pelagic shark catches in general, is the rising demand for shark fins used for the traditional soup in China. This hunt for pelagic sharks leads to the overfishing and depletion of their populations around the world. The main species taken by European longliners in the Atlantic Ocean are blue shark, mako shark, thresher shark and hammerhead shark. Thresher and mako sharks are considered globally “Vulnerable” by IUCN (World Conservation Union) Red List criteria, and the hammerhead shark is considered “Endangered”. The blue shark, the world's most abundant and heavily fished pelagic shark, is considered “Near Threatened” and scientists have noted declines of 50-70% of this species in the North

Atlantic.

Oceana's reports present a series of recommendations for effective shark management in the European Union. This first published report stresses the need to land sharks in ports with their fins attached at their bodies, to ensure a truly effective EU shark finning prohibition, and to regulate commercially exploited shark species under the Common Fisheries Policy through fishing limits and quotas.

Oceana has made the report available at the following link

http://www.oceana.org/fileadmin/oceana/uploads/europe/reports/hunted_for_fins.pdf

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Oceana campaigns to protect and restore the world's oceans. Our teams of marine scientists, economists, lawyers and advocates win specific and concrete policy changes to reduce pollution and to prevent the irreversible collapse of fish populations, marine mammals and other sea life. Global in scope and dedicated to conservation, Oceana has campaigners based in Europe (Madrid, Spain; Brussels, Belgium), North America (Washington, DC; Juneau, AK; Los Angeles, CA), and South America (Santiago, Chile). More than 300,000 members and e-activists in over 150 countries have already joined Oceana. For more information, please visit www.Oceana.org.